



Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force

P.O. Box 1990, Santa Barbara, CA 93102-1990
Fax Number 805.564.5480

Phone Number 805.564.5437
www.santabarbaraCA.gov

AGENDA DATE: October 3, 2007

TO: Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force

FROM: Erik Axelson, Deputy Parks Director, County of Santa Barbara

SUBJECT: Additional Information on Trail Management Practices

RECOMMENDATION: That the Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force (Task Force) receive a presentation on additional information related to trail management.

DISCUSSION:

At its meeting on September 5, 2007, the Task Force received a presentation on a number of alternative approaches to addressing trail use conflict. The Task Force requested additional information on methods to designate trail use. The following information is focused on the Mid-Penninsula Regional Open Space District.

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, California

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District adopted a comprehensive policy governing the use, development, and management of the region's extensive trail system (more than 200 miles of trails). The District tries to balance two sometimes competing objectives – environmental protection of sensitive preserve land (over 50,000 acres) and encouraging public access to the District's trail system.

In considering appropriate levels of public use, the District looks at each of its 25 preserves individually to determine which user types are consistent with its overarching mission of environmental protection. Each preserve is the subject of a use and management plan (U & M Plan), usually prepared at the time of property acquisition. Often, there are existing roads and trails that may be adapted as part of the U & M Plan for various degrees of public access. I am told that the District has developed a trail element table that itemizes key criteria in developing the best management policy for each preserve, but to date, I have not seen a copy of the table. The U & M Plan is reviewed and updated every few years to identify new user trends and develop trails that will meet these demands.

Trails are rated by four general objective criteria that to some extent dictate the types of use that are permitted. These are:

1. Trail Width - represents the width of the trail pad or graded area including the path in which trail users travel and the shoulders of the path which in many cases may be overgrown.
2. Trail Grade - describes the steepness of a trail. It is based on the change in elevation between two points along the length of the trail.
3. Side Slope - represents the steepness of the area adjacent to a trail. It is based on the change in elevation between two points along a line perpendicular to a trail.
4. Line of Sight - describes the distance a trail user can see along the length of a trail. Large trees, rocks, or embankments can limit the line of sight and ability to see oncoming trail users. Line of sight is based on the average height of a trail user traveling in the middle of the trail.

Based on these criteria, trails are then assigned to one of a descending order of trail categories – A, B or C, with A-level trails being the most commodious permitting the widest types of uses and C-level trails the least commodious with greater use restrictions. About 75% of the District's trails fall into one of these categories, with the remainder as very limited trails that traverse environmentally sensitive areas that usually require permits or guides for use.

Below is the pertinent section of the District's policies detailing the U & M Plan and trail element process. Attachment A provides a reproduction of the entire document.

Preserve Use & Management Plan (U & M Plan) - Prepared for each preserve or site. Typically starts off as a brief document at the time of acquisition, describing the existing conditions, sensitive resources, and potential hazards, and designating access on existing roads and trails as appropriate. Public use is usually light until parking and other amenities are provided. Based on an overall schedule, the District revisits the plan for each preserve in detail, to identify opportunities for new trails, parking areas, restrooms, and needs for special management or restoration actions.

Trail Element Update - Part of the detailed U & M Plan, a Trail Element contains the description and use designations for existing and proposed trails. The District is in the process of preparing or updating Trail Elements, starting with the most popular or emphasized preserves, in order to apply the recently-adopted Trail Use Policies and Guidelines. It is in the Trail Use Element that the final decisions are made about which uses should be allowed on each trail.

ATTACHMENTS: A. Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District policies

SUBMITTED BY: Jill E. Zachary, Assistant Parks and Recreation Director, City of Santa Barbara